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OPEN-ENDED WORKING GROUP ON THE REVIEW
OF ARRANGEMENTS FOR CONSULTATIONS
WITH NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS
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GENERAL REVIEW OF ARRANGEMENTS FOR CONSULTATIONS WITH NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Statement submitted by the Conference of Non-governmental Organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement which is being circulated in accordance with paragraph 10 of the annex to Economic and Social Council resolution 1993/80.

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INTRODUCTION

1. There is a great diversity of non-governmental organizations among those in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council and among the membership of the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (CONGO). In keeping with its mandate, CONGO advocates first and foremost that non-governmental organizations in consultative status should have every opportunity to present their views with respect to the proposed revision of Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

2. While the right of each organization in consultative status to present its own views is fully respected, CONGO also provides a forum through which non-governmental organizations can seek and express consensus. To that end, CONGO has initiated wide-ranging consultations involving both its members and other organizations having consultative status. In addition CONGO has undertaken initiatives and held meetings in order to develop dialogue with organizations that are currently not in consultative status.

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* E/AC.70/1995/1.

9. The introduction should definitely focus upon the positive contribution of the work of non-governmental organizations in relation to the Charter of the United Nations as well as its ongoing work. It would be counterproductive to introduce questionable assertions that would only have the effect of detracting from the importance of the historical and potential contribution of non-governmental organizations to the United Nations.

References to Agenda 21 (para. 1, para. 7)

10. It is not appropriate to highlight that any single United Nations event or document in a framework resolution of this kind that deals with non-governmental organizations' participation related to many aspects of the work of the United Nations. While Agenda 21 is one of the significant documents that has been adopted by United Nations Member States in recent times, it is itself part of a broader evolving process. Moreover, the use of Agenda 21 as a definition document for non-governmental organizations' participation in this framework resolution is confusing in that Agenda 21 itself is not sufficiently coherent in its definition of non-governmental organizations.

National affiliates of international non-governmental organizations (para. 15)

11. CONGO believes that there is general agreement on the desirability of further enhancing the participation of national non-governmental organizations from all regions of the world in the activities of the United Nations. However, it is our opinion that not enough work has been done to think through the implications of how this shared objective may best be achieved. The proposed paragraph 15 might have unintended consequences: would it not be a disincentive for non-governmental organizations to maintain their relationship with international and regional organizations, thereby weakening rather than strengthening international solidarity?

12. CONGO is not suggesting new wording on paragraph 15, because it wants to identify its content as an important substantive issue that deserves more time and attention on the part of the Working Group. CONGO would, however, draw particular attention to the resolution of its Nineteenth General Assembly, in which it affirmed, inter alia,

> That participation of non-governmental organizations from developing countries should be strengthened through a multifaceted process fully recognizing the crucial role played by international, regional and subregional non-governmental organizations, and further expressed concern, inter alia,
>
> Over the discrimination practised against national affiliates that wish to be represented at United Nations world conferences as part of the delegations of their international non-governmental organizations.

Competency criteria (para. 25)

13. We believe that option 1 is a good proposal because it:

(a) Relates to the achievement of the objectives of the United Nations;

(b) Reflects the ongoing relationship between the work of the United Nations and that of non-governmental organizations as a criteria for admittance;

(c) Incorporates the rich history of the consultative status process;

(d) Allows for an evolving consultative input that would include the wide diversity of experiences and constituencies of non-governmental organizations.

SPECIFIC PROPOSALS FOR ALTERNATIVE WORDING

Paragraph 4

14. The language of paragraph 4 is confusing regarding the matters falling within the competence of the Economic and Social Council. CONGO suggests that paragraph 4 be deleted and the original paragraph 1 be retained, with the addition of "environment" and "humanitarian issues". The more complete listing of issues in old paragraph 1 is helpful in that it builds upon the existing mandate of the Council.

15. CONGO proposes the following wording:

> The organization shall be concerned with matters falling within the competence of the Economic and Social Council with respect to international economic, social, environmental, cultural, educational, health, scientific, technological and related matters and to humanitarian issues and human rights.

Paragraph 7

16. The attempt to present a checklist of non-governmental organizations is unsuccessful and raises more questions than it answers. For example, there is no reference to trade union organizations, which are the social partners of business organizations and government. CONGO proposes that the new text be deleted.

Paragraphs 8-10

17. These paragraphs require further discussion and possible reordering subsequently.

Paragraph 11

18. The phrase "covering, where possible, a substantial number of countries in different regions of the world" (old para. 4) should be retained.

Paragraph 25

19. CONGO suggests that option No. 1 be accepted (see para. 13 above).

Paragraphs 31 and 37

20. CONGO proposes that the phrase "subject to available resources" be deleted.

21. If adopted, the practical effect of that change would almost certainly be to restrict the ability of non-governmental organizations to have their written statements circulated by the Secretariat in the working languages as official documents of the functional commissions. Thus, the proposal would curtail one of the most important participatory rights successfully practised over the years.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

22. The draft proposals make several references to Secretariat support, the provision of necessary resources, and improving the coordination within the Secretariat of units dealing with non-governmental organizations (see paras. 18 and 66). Those proposals respond to concerns expressed by CONGO over many years and reaffirmed at its Nineteenth General Assembly. It is crucial that such important proposals be accompanied by appropriate budgetary provisions at United Nations Headquarters, United Nations offices at Geneva and Vienna, and the regional commissions.

23. In the year of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations, it is more important than ever to keep in mind the fundamental objective of these procedures, which must surely be to strengthen the relationship between the United Nations and non-governmental organizations. The growing vigour of grass-roots movements and of their international linkages is a phenomenon of our time that responds to profound human needs and provides opportunities for the reinvigoration of the United Nations and its institutions. The strength of that phenomenon in developing countries and countries with economies in transition provides the prospect of achieving true universality in the institutions and organizations of international solidarity. The challenge before States and non-governmental organizations alike is to establish procedures that will seize those opportunities by introducing a new dynamic into the international solidarity that was foreseen in Article 71 of the Charter of the United Nations.